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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM No. 187

02

SUBJECT: Italian Farm Labor Strike

If the strike of Italian farm laborers is not ended speedily, there is danger of severe crop losses, continuation of bread rationing (now scheduled to end 1 July), and increased violence. Except for rice (of which there is, incidentally, a surplus from last year), relatively little crop loss appears to have occurred to date. A crucial situation, however, is developing with the advent of the wheat harvest season. Harvesting of Italy's entire annual production of six million tons of wheat --two-thirds of its total yearly requirement--should be complete in the next six or eight weeks. (Mature wheat can remain unharvested for only seven to ten days before rotting.) The value of the Italian wheat crop is about equal to the proposed \$555 million of ECA aid to Italy in the coming fiscal year; the need to replace a considerable portion of the crop would seriously retard Italian economic recovery.

Beginning in the Po Valley and Latum on 18 May, the strike has spread over most of agricultural Italy, and involves more than a million laborers, who were joined on 31 May by the share-croppers. There have been sporadic but increasingly frequent clashes between the strikers and police. To protest alleged police violence, one-day general strikes were recently held in four Po Valley provinces, and large-scale sympathy walk-outs are threatened by labor leader, Di Vittorio. (The leader of the Free Labor Confederation has admitted that the position of the landowners is comparatively strong, because of the weakness of the unions and the numerous unemployed workers available as strikebreakers.)

Both the Italian General Confederation of Labor and the Free Labor Confederation, representing the workers, are demanding a national contract setting uniform country-wide wages and working conditions, but apparently no progress has yet been made in this important issue. A national contract is adamantly opposed by the landowners on the grounds that the wide variation in farming costs and conditions in Italy dictate regional and local solutions to labor problems. The need for governmental intervention to break this impasse has become increasingly apparent, in view of the prospect of further violence, the danger of serious economic loss, and the possible consequent weakening of the Government's popular support.

FOOTNOTE: This memorandum has not been coordinated with the intelligence organization of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.

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NO CHANGE in Class.

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